

Green Paper "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations"

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Do you consent to the publication of your personal data/data relating to your organisation with the publication of your replies to the consultation? Yes	
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Please specify the name of your organisation or institution Assembly of European Regions (AER)	
Country where your organisation is based FR - France	
Explanation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you take the view that the discussion of demographic trends and managing their impact should take place at European level? • If so, what should be the objectives, and which policy areas are concerned? <p>As the political and executive voice of the regions, the AER is a key partner in policy areas that relate to regional competence. Demographic developments play an important role in the policy process with regard to housing, welfare, care, work, education and leisure. These aspects are related either directly or indirectly to regional policy. Recently, the AER has focused intensively on demographic challenges. It is well known that demographic change is not occurring at the same pace in every region. For example, certain regions in Sweden and Italy are experiencing demographic changes that will not affect regions in the Netherlands for another 15 years. Via its project 'Alive, European challenge to ageing', the AER has established a platform for facilitating the exchange of information, best practices, ideas and projects between the regions of Europe. This is the key principle underlying the concept of 'learning regions'. AER proposed policy objectives On the basis of its knowledge and experience, the AER wishes to make a number of comments and propose a number of additions to the Green Paper. The AER believes that the EU plays an important role in creating a society that responds appropriately to demographic change. The AER is happy that the European Commission is committed to seeking solutions to demographic challenges, based on a broad perspective. The demographic developments affect not only the healthcare sector and labour market, but also family relationships and solidarity between the generations. The EU should therefore consider the following in this context: - We must not focus solely on the problems resulting from demographic change. We must also emphasise the potential and opportunities. - The formulation of a life-stage policy and family policy should be a priority on the agenda of the EU. - The regional level is the ideal context in which to establish a platform for</p>	

facilitating and stimulating the opportunities and challenges resulting from demographic change. - Innovative strategies are required for dealing with the consequences of demographic change, e.g. to achieve a balance between work and formal/informal care. - The establishment of a European funding programme that is oriented towards the opportunities resulting from demographic change, stimulates innovative projects, and focuses on young people as well as senior citizens.

1. The challenges of European demography

1.1. The challenge of a low birth rate

Over many years, the Union has been making considerable efforts to achieve equality between men and women and has coordinated national social protection policies.

- How can a better work/life balance help to tackle the problems associated with demographic ageing?
- How can a more balanced distribution of household and family tasks between men and women be encouraged?
- Should the award of certain benefits or advantages (leave, etc.) be linked to an equal distribution of tasks between the sexes? How best to ensure an adequate income for both parents on parental leave?
- How can the availability of child care structures (crèches, nursery schools, etc.) and elderly care structures be improved by the public and private sectors?
- Can a reduced rate of VAT contribute to the development of care services?
- How can parents, in particular young parents, be encouraged to enter the labour market, have the career that they want and the number of children they want?

Identify the opportunities that demographic change can bring The AER predicts that, in the decades to come, demographic changes will force us to deal with complex issues. The most important themes are described in the Green Paper. However, in the debate on demographic change, little attention is paid to positive aspects. The AER believes that the positive contribution that senior citizens make to society should be more strongly emphasised and encouraged. Senior citizens have an increasingly important role to play in stimulating the economy (tourism, leisure activities) and reinforcing the social infrastructure (family care, voluntary work).

1.2. The possible contribution of immigration

The Thessaloniki European Council in June 2003 declared that an EU integration policy for immigrants should help to meet the new demographic and economic challenges currently facing the EU. This is the debate initiated by the Green Paper adopted last January.

- To what extent can immigration mitigate certain negative effects of demographic ageing?
- What policies should be developed for better integrating these migrants, in particular young people?
- How could Community instruments, in particular the legislative framework to combat discrimination, the structural funds and the Employment Strategy, contribute?

2. A new solidarity between the generations

2.1. Better integration of young people

European objectives have been laid down for the prevention of long-term youth unemployment, combating early school leaving and raising the level of initial training. The structural funds help to attain them at grass roots level.

- How can initial training and adult training schemes be improved? What can non-

formal education and voluntary activities contribute? How can the structural funds and the instruments for achieving better access to the knowledge society contribute?

- How can the bridges between school and working life and the quality of young people's employment be improved? What role should social dialogue play? What can dialogue with civil society, in particular youth organisations, contribute

Improving the integration of young people: a matter of taking responsibility... The AER endorses the necessity of the improved integration of young people in all aspects of society. Social exclusion, for whatever reason, is unacceptable. Major efforts are required to combat school drop-out and failure, and to ensure that young people leave school with a qualification. A good vocational education is the best way to escape poverty. EU policy must also be geared towards young people with greater prospects, because their economic input is significant and they serve as a role model for others. In order to achieve a higher level of integration, it is necessary to establish a dialogue with young people themselves, with regard to their own responsibilities and choices. Local and regional authorities have a key role to play. They are able to function as "directors" to bring together the various stakeholders and stimulate discussions.

- How can Community policies contribute more to combating child poverty and poverty among single-parent families and to reducing the risk of poverty and exclusion among young people?
- What forms of solidarity can be fostered between young people and elderly people?

In the context of an ageing society, the increasing demand for care, and the increasing pressure on the healthcare sector, the AER believes it is important to present careers in elderly care in a more positive light in order to attract more young people into a career in the care sector.

2.2. A global approach to the "working life cycle"

In order to foster the transition to a knowledge society, EU policies promote the modernisation of work organisation, the definition of lifelong learning strategies, the quality of the working environment and "active ageing", in particular raising the average retirement age. Demographic changes reinforce the importance of these policies, whilst raising new questions:

- How can the organisation of work be modernised, to take into account the specific needs of each age group?
- How can young couples' integration in working life be facilitated and how can we help them to find a balance between flexibility and security to bring up their children, to train and update their skills to meet the demands of the labour market? How can we enable older people to work more?

Create suitable conditions for a modern life-course policy Creating a climate that is conducive to a modern life-course policy is a major challenge that should be a priority on the agenda of the various government bodies. It is clear that the traditional 'school-work-retirement' pattern will take on more flexible forms as a result of demographic change. In a population characterised by ageing and dejuvenation, the pressure on formal and informal care will increase. In addition, the labour-force participation rate is increasing among women. This will require a new balance between work and formal/informal care, a more flexible labour market, and increased investment in necessary preconditions such as childcare facilities. A flexible life-course policy will give people the opportunity temporarily to look after a person who needs care, or follow a course of study later in life. The AER believes that there should be a wide-ranging debate on modern life-course policy, so that the form, content and consequences can be more effectively identified. In addition, companies should make firmer commitments to implement the concept of Lifelong Learning.

- How can work organisation best be adapted to a new distribution between the generations, with fewer young people and more older workers?
- How can the various stakeholders in the Union contribute, in particular by way of social dialogue and civil society?

In the field of informal care in particular, the AER would advise the European Commission to reinforce this aspect of the social infrastructure by means of specific European funding programmes. Also important in this context is the need to achieve a favourable balance between work and informal care.

The regions as bridge-builders... The European regions can make an important contribution in terms of dealing with the challenges and problems of demographic change. By entering into a permanent dialogue with citizens, local authorities, the private sector, care providers and the welfare sector, it will be possible to bring these sectors closer together, enabling them to develop a shared vision and to build and exchange information and expertise. This is the formula on which the 'learning region' is based. The task of the regional governments is to motivate the key stakeholders and facilitate the development of a powerful policy designed to deal with the consequences of an ageing population.

2.3. A new place for "elderly people"

The European coordination of retirement scheme reforms is promoting more flexible bridges between work and retirement.

- Should there be a statutory retirement age, or should flexible, gradual retirement be permitted?
- How can elderly people participate in economic and social life, e.g. through a combination of wages and pensions, new forms of employment (part-time, temporary) or other forms of financial incentive?
- How can activities employing elderly people in the voluntary sector and the social economy be developed?
- What should be the response to pensioner mobility between Member States, in particular with regard to social protection and health care?
- How should we be investing in health promotion and prevention so that the people of Europe continue to benefit from longer healthy life expectancy?

Innovative strategies The AER believes in the power of senior citizens. Again, we would recommend that, in the years to come, EU policy emphasise the positive aspects of age. People want to live independently for as long as possible. They have considerable social capital (e.g. social skills) that could be put to greater use in the community. However, the right conditions must be created in order to achieve this. There is a great deal of work to be done on this in the near future at local, regional, national and European level. It is still the case that too many senior citizens, and people with a disability, are excluded from participation in society. Many of these people have the capacity to participate actively in a job or in the local community. Society does not make sufficient use of their skills and knowledge.

2.4 Solidarity with the very elderly

The coordination of national social protection policies is due to be extended to long-term care for the elderly in 2006. How can this help to manage demographic change?

- The coordination of national social protection policies is due to be extended to long-term care for the elderly in 2006. How can this help to manage demographic change?
- In particular, should a distinction be drawn between retirement pensions and dependency allowances?
- How do we train the human resources needed and provide them with good quality jobs in a sector which is often characterised by low salaries and low qualifications?
- How do we arrive at a balanced distribution of care for the very old between families, social services and institutions? What can be done to help families? What can be done to support local care networks?
- And what can be done to reduce inequality between men and women when they reach retirement age?
- How can new technologies support older people?

In addition to the above, the AER asks the European Commission to pay attention to the contribution that technological advances can make in terms of enabling people to lead an independent life for as long as possible. Domatics is still at an early stage of development, but the benefits are already

evident.

3. Conclusion: what should the European Union's role be?

- Should the European Union be promoting exchanges and regular (e.g. annual) analysis of demographic change and its impact on societies and all the policies concerned?
- Should the Union's financial instruments – particularly the structural funds – take better account of these changes? If so, how?
- How could European coordination of employment and social protection policies better take on board demographic change?
- How can European social dialogue contribute to the better management of demographic change? What role can civil society and civil dialogue with young people play?
- How can demographic change be made an integral part of all the Union's internal and external policies?

The AER is aware that, in the broad context of demographic change, the Member States and local/regional authorities have important responsibilities. Since there are differences between the regions, this is the level at which interregional interaction and innovation can be developed. The EU can stimulate and facilitate this process, based on the subsidiarity principle. The AER looks forward to the next step in the process of formulating a widely supported EU policy for addressing demographic change in Europe. We hope that this response will provide valuable input for that process. Naturally the AER, representing the 250 member regions from 30 European countries, is committed to working with the European Commission to create a sustainable Europe.

The Questionnaire

How did you perceive this questionnaire? Expectations met